

An Appraisal on The Imposition of Colonial Rule in Western Idoma Land in The 19th century

Christiana Enubi Akogwu

Department of History and International Studies

Federal University of Lafia

enubiakogwu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the incursion of British colonial rule in western Idomaland and the nature of resistance to colonial rule with a view to interrogate the changes introduced in the study area at the time and to understand the legacies of colonialism in the context of postcolonial socio-political and economic development. The paper argues that the traditional socio-political structures of the study area were dislocated by the very nature, philosophy and structures of British colonialism as elsewhere in Africa. The use of both primary and secondary sources was employed in arriving at the conclusions in the study. Extant sources on colonialism were consulted, archival documents and oral interviews were also conducted in the six districts of western Idomaland as follows: Edumoga, Ichama, Okpoga, Otukpa, Orokam and Owukpa to achieve the objectives of the paper. The paper recommends that strengthening the existing traditional socio-political institutions is imperative for the socio-economic and political development of the study area.

Keywords: Colonial rule, Indirect rule, Imperialism, Sovereignty, Taxation.

Introduction

The consequences of colonialism on the subject people remained enormous. Propelled mainly by economic motives, the colonialist adopted all measures at their disposal to achieve this objective. In the process, almost all aspects of the subject people's economic, political, and social lives were affected. Being so pervasive, no part of the

Nigerian area was spared. Imposition of colonial taxation was one of the colonial measures adopted to achieve economic exploitation, which subsequently, suborned to exploitation of the western Idomaland through the development of wage labour, as that, was the instrumental factor which ultimately opened the people to exploitation.¹

The British Colonial Authority adopted some deliberate economic policies aimed at total exploitation of both material and human resources of the different polities in the area. Central in this policy was taxation, which was crucial in determining the efficiency of all the other agencies, wage labour, and trade favourable to colonial economic objective.² As a result, the agency of taxation affected the lives of the people in no small way. The absence of market economy, and therefore of the British currency to pay colonial taxes sent able-bodied men and women to the tin and coal mines. Thus colonial taxation fashioned an important aspect of the huge directory of the consequences of colonialism on the people of Western Idomaland.

Although, an essentially economic and political phenomenon, colonial rule left behind its trail a plethora of developments which had serious implications on the society of western Idomaland. Just like resistance to colonialism in other parts of the world like Ethiopia, the Ashanti's of Ghana down to places in Nigeria like the non-centralised Tiv society, the Igala of central Nigeria, the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the western and southern regions of Nigeria where the fiercely rejected colonialism. The western Idoma land was not an exception in terms of resistance to colonial rule but, resistance by the western Idoma people was however, hampered by lack of unity.³ It is against this background that this paper attempts a discourse the process of the imposition of colonial rule in western Idomaland and its impact on the people. While,

¹. M. U. Elaigwu, *Colonial Conquest, and the Beginning of Exploitation in Idomaland Land, 1900-1960: A Study of Identity and Challenges of Taxation*, (Enugu: Anoze Publishers, 1981), 137-138.

². O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria*: in T. Falola and O. O. Okpeh (ed), *Population Movement, Conflict and Displacement in Nigeria*, (Treton, African World Press, Inc., 2008), 48.

³. Oral interview with: Michael Okwulono, 67 years male, retired civil servant, Makurdi, 13/2/2024.

western Idomaland is not an area for which the colonial administration appeared to have had any particular strategic economic interest, developments in the area were greatly influenced by policies formulated against the background of broader considerations, with regards to the colony and protectorate of Nigeria. The discourse will therefore situate western Idomaland within the mainstream of British colonial rule. It attempts to illuminate in due course, the nexus between colonial administrative policies and the people's resistance to this alien rule. This is done within the context of the military conquest and subjugation of the people, colonial prejudices and the resulting social, economic and political changes which forced the people into wage labour.

This paper, is aimed at providing the impacts of British colonial rule on the traditional system of governance in western Idomaland. Existed works on the Idoma generally, have not sufficiently addressed this. The work will therefore, be examined under five broad headings. The first is conceptual explanations, the second is the evolution of colonial rule and conquest of Western Idoma Land. The third is the reasons for British Colonial incursion in Western Idomaland while the fourth is colonial infrastructures and the introduction of taxation and lastly the impact of British Colonial Rule in Western Idoma Land. There will also be conclusion/recommendations at the end of the chapter.

Conceptual Frame Work

The concept colonialism according to S. Ocheni and B. C. Nwankwo,⁴ is the direct and overall domination of one country by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power (For example, the direct and overall domination of Nigeria by Britain between 1900-1960). R. Longley⁵ on the other hand, conceptualise colonialism as resulting in

⁴. S. Ocheni and B. C. Nwankwo, Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa, in Journal of Cross Cultural Communication, Vol. 8 No. (3), 2012, 46-54. Available on URL:<http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020120803.1189>DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020120803.1189>, Accessed on 26/1/2024. accessed <https://www.teenvogue.com/contributor/jamila-osma> 25/1/2024

⁵. Robert Longley, What is Colonialism? Definition and Examples, 2012 <http://www.thoughtco.comcolonialism-definition-and-examples-5112779> 25/1/2024.

control over life of natives in political, economic, cultural and social sphere while Ronald Horvath, conceptualise colonialism as a form of domination, which involves the subjugation by individual or groups over the territory of one people by another or the practice of one country taking full or partial political control of another country and occupying it with settlers for the purposes of profiting from its resources and economy.⁶ J. Osman, defined colonialism as control by one power over a dependent area or people. In practice, it is when one country violently invades and takes control of another country, claims the land as its own, and the inhabitants to live on that land.⁷ Note however that, the first objective of colonialism is political domination. Its second objective is to make possible the exploitation of the colonized country which implies cultural domination however, the main goal for colonialism is extraction of economic benefits from the colony.⁸

Evolution of Colonial Rule in Western Idoma Land

In discussing the Evolution of colonial rule in Western Idomaland, it is necessary we understand the area under study. Therefore, in the light of the above, Western Idomaland is situated within Ogbadibo and Okpokwu Local Government Areas of Benue State precisely, in North Central Nigeria. Ogbadibo Local Government Area span an area of 598 km² and a population of 128,707 by 2006 population projection.⁹ Okpokwu on the other hand has an area of 731 km² and a population of 176,647 as projected by the 2006 census.¹⁰ Western Idoma land lies "in the low land of the Niger – Benue trough, at latitude 7 07' N and longitude 7 35'W." The temperature averages between 400F and 500F. The area lies within the Guinea Savannah region with distinguishable belt of vegetation

⁶. Loomba, A. "Colonialism/Post-Colonialism", 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2015), 20.

⁷. Jamila Osama, what is Colonialism? A History of Violence, Control and Exploitation, in Teen Vogue 2020., accessed <https://www.teenvogue.com/contributor/jamila-osma25/1/2024>.

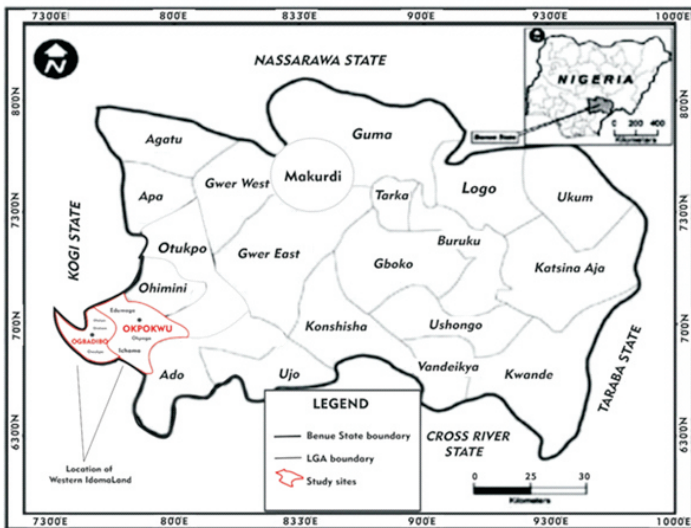
⁸. S. Ocheni and B. C. Nwankwo, 46-45.

⁹. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogbadibo> Retrieved on 27/04/2022.

¹⁰. E. O. Eko "Benue State at 30: The Society and Struggles so Far:", (Abuja: Enoch Press, 2006), 37.

which is that of a change over between the plants and shrubs rain forest of Eastern Nigeria on the Southern part of both Okpokuwu and Ogbadibo Local Government Areas, and the grassland Savannah, to the North. The area is nearly all orchard. Among the groups inhabiting the area are; Edumoga, Ichama, Okpoga, Otukpa, Orokam, and Owukpa.¹¹ The map of the study area is clearly shown below on the map of Benue State and Nigeria for the purpose of clarity.

Figure 1: Map of Benue State showing Western Idomaland



Source: Author's modification from the Political Map of Benue State (2024).

The military conquest and occupation of the people of western Idomaland was characterised by wanton display of brute force by the British appears to have been unavoidable. This is because the event itself was part of the grand imperial plan to conquer the various polities within the Nigeria area. This plan involved among others, the removal of all resistance to the installation of British rule, the expansion and consolidation of British authorities over the peoples of Nigeria as a sine

¹¹. E. O. Eko, 15-17.

qua non to the establishment of the imperative objective conditions for the actualization of the economic objectives of European imperialism.¹² Consequently, it would appear that colonialism detested the existence of a free people because, western Idomaland, unlike other parts of Idomaland, was not an area for which the British had any particular strategic interest, yet it was forced to suffer the bitter lessons of colonial conquest and subjugation like the other Nigerian polities.

The coming of the British colonialists to Central Nigeria beginning from 1900, as with the rest of Nigeria created a general mutation which set in place a chain reaction with irreversible consequences for most of the societies. Several schools of thoughts have debated the factors or reasons responsible for the desperate and forceful occupation by European powers of hitherto independent African States and societies particularly from 1900. The capitalist mode of production in Europe at this period necessitated the need to acquire colonies and markets outside Europe in order to source raw materials for European industries and markets to force down the throats of the peoples of Africa European junks.¹³

Nevertheless, the colonial conquest and occupation of Idoma area, like others, commenced effectively in 1908.¹⁴ Briefly put, A. Ekoja's¹⁵ view on British colonialization of Western Idoma area like other parts of Central Nigeria, was a slow and gradual process. Indeed, for a fairly long time, the area did not capture the attention of the British authority. A combination of its geographical distance away from the coast and lack of adequate knowledge of the area stalled the colonialist from penetrating it as early as they did in other coastal parts like Lagos, Calabar, and Port

¹². E. A. Ocheme, "Colonial Conquest and Resistance: The Case of Idomaland", MA Dissertation, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, (2001), 82-85.

¹³. A. Z. Ngharen, Colonial Conquest, Subordination and the Genesis of the Development of Exploitation in Akwanga: in History, Colonialism and the Underdevelopment of Akwanga Division; A Study of Identity and Challenges, (Gariki-Abuja: CMBS Publishers, 2014), 137-138.

¹⁴. NAK Mak/prof/ACC/109/Special Report, 1925, 30.

¹⁵. Oral Interview: AjunwaEkoja, 77 years, Ex-service man, Ai'ifam-Owukpa, 02/10/2021.

Harcourt. As opined by O. O. Okpeh,¹⁶ the economic viability of Central Nigeria, was already known after the Mac Gregor Laird expedition of 1832. Note however that, the systematic penetration of Central Nigeria by the British did not commence until after the mid nineteenth century. From this period to the beginning of the twentieth century, this process was dominated by the activities of the Royal Niger Company in league with others like the River Niger and Navigation Company.¹⁷ It was the activities of these companies and their merchants that paved the path for the eventual effective colonization of the Central Nigerian Area.

The British authorities, used different tactics including the deployment of Hausa's as middlemen to explore the land. The Idoma were both suspicious and wary of these tactics of the colonialists. However, open confrontation between the middlemen and the Idoma resulted in the killing of one agent of the Royal Niger Company at Adoka in 1909.¹⁸ The murder of the Hausa agent, provided the opportunity and justification the colonialists needed to attack the Idoma communities. The punitive expedition sent by the British against the Idoma for the murder of their spy resulted in the killing of twenty- three people with scores wounded. As part of the chastisement and in order to teach them a bitter lesson, thirteen Idoma communities were burnt down and food reserves destroyed amidst looting and stealing of livestock by the rampaging colonial soldiers. After the attack on the Idoma communities which was very protracted and costly both in terms of men and resources, the conflict that day was decided in favour of the British mainly because of their superiority and disparity in arms meanwhile, the stolen livestock's and food were taken to feed the British recruited soldiers who fought the battles.¹⁹

It is worthy of note that, the attitude of the Idoma people towards the invading British 'escorts' was affected not only by the brutality of the

¹⁶ O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria*: in T. Falola and O. O. Okpeh (ed), *Population Movement, Conflict and Displacement in Nigeria*, (Treton, African World Press, Inc., 2008). 39.

¹⁷ A. H. M. Kirk-Green, "Expansion of the Benue, 1830-1900", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol.1., 1958, 212-235.

¹⁸ NAK Makprof/ACC27/Old District Note Books, 1932, 7-9.

¹⁹ NAK Makprof/ACC27/Old District Note Books, 1932, 7.

raids but also by the presence of the British agents. The influx of these aliens particularly, following hard on the heels of British military penetration helped to complicate matters.²⁰ To many of the Idoma's, memories of the 'Horse war-(Ewu-onyia)"i.e. the Fulani Jihads were still too fresh to risk believing or relating with these Hausa slavers and Jihadists. The ferocious attempts by the Idoma to keep out their traditional Muslim foes and by implication resist the British who they saw as an extension of the slave period and accomplices of the Jihadist's penetration contributed to the prejudice that was to colour the attitude of the administration towards Idoma land throughout the colonial era. At this point, the Northern, Central, and Western Idoma was subjugated by British patrols operating from their base on boundary demarcation expedition under captain Byng-Hall which passed through Ugbojuand Onyagede to link up with their counter parts from southern Nigeria.²¹

Reasons for British Colonial Incursion in Western Idomaland

The pivotal aim of the British colonial authority in a particular region of West Africa was to colonize it for economic gains as part of the other Nigerian regions. However, in most colonised states, this act was abused beyond measure because of the brutal use of force by the British in governance of any colonised territory.²² In the same vein, Attah²³ points out that, the colonization process was particularly a bitter experience for the people of Western Idomaland. The reason for British subjugation of the people for instance, was characterised by an excessive show of force which was as a result of three salient factors;

The first reason, was the superior military tactics of the British. The second, was the dictates of imperialism, and thirdly, the desire of the people to be left alone and to remain in control of their collective destiny which was not in accordance with British imperial interests.²⁴ From the

²⁰. NAK Mak/prof/ACC109/Special Report, 1925, 28.

²¹. NAK Mak/prof/ACC 11/Northern Area Old District Note Books Vol. 1, 1929, 21-22.

²². Interview with Ofiekwu, J. O., 79 years, Ex-service man, Ede-Otukpa, 03/10/2021.

²³. Oral Interview; I. AttahOchogwu, 81 years, Retired civil servant, in Ukpoko-Orokam, 17/06/2021

²⁴. O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria*, 41.

same frame of thought Ofikwu,²⁵ contends that, British authorities in Western Idomaland brought assaults on freedom and abuse on the existing traditional institution in the area. Before their incursion, the area, was divided into hamlets with a Head Chief who oversees the various politically divided hamlets. These Head chiefs were usually chosen on rotational basis with the baton of leadership passing from person to person. Absolutism is very strange to the people as the chief does not take absolute decision of his own but must consult his chamber members for opinions. All of this were in place before the incursion of the colonialists.

The ushering in of indirect rule system and introduction of warrant chief system, changed the perception of the already existing political structure. This left instability and chronic problems for the societies of Western Idomaland. The British implemented the policy of indirect rule system, a system in which traditional institutions under the direct guidance of the British were used to direct the activities of the people. In non-centralized societies of the Middle Belt such as the Western Idoma land, warrant chiefs were enforced on the people.²⁶

Ekere however pointed out that, the imposition of warrant chiefs was in total disregard of the peculiarities of the societies.²⁷ The adoption of the policy of indirect rule ruined the traditional institutions and triggered innumerable destruction on the culture of Idoma society in totality. It also pitted the educated elite class against the evolving Hausa like traditional elites or rulers. Even though, it is generally acknowledged by scholars like E. O. Erim, V. G. Okwu and A. M. Adejo that, the imposition of colonial rule on African states was a major impulse in the emergence of modern population movement.²⁸ In this connection, this structural disarticulation of Nigeria was deliberately aimed at outlying the country in a way that would entrench dependency

²⁵ Interview with Ofiekwu, J. O., 03/10/2021.

²⁶ Interview with Ofiekwu, J. O., 03/10/2021.

²⁷ Interview with EkereEjeh, 69 years, Male, (Retired Civil Servant), Ankpa Ward, Makurdi, L.G.A, 12th March, 2021.

²⁸ O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria*: in T. Falola and O. O. Okpeh (ed), *Population Movement, Conflict and Displacement in Nigeria*, (Treton, African World Press, Inc., 2008). 39.

and under-development, while at the same time serving the economic purpose of transforming Nigeria into the "safe haven" of British capitalist expansion process.

Accordingly, colonial rule in Western Idomaland was also an important instrumental factor in the people's migration from the area as the era was considered a great period of change in which the pre-colonial economic relations was incorporated under colonial capitalism²⁹. Although colonial military expeditions in Nigeria for instance, was such a show of force which was necessary to pacify inherently primordial communities, as the war of subjugation waged on the people destroyed several settlements, causing mass migrations of people from their abodes.³⁰

Thus, much of western Idomaland remained unsettled until after World War I, although expeditions from the south had penetrated these areas after 1908. The Niger-Cross River Expedition under Colonel Trenchard had visited Southern Idoma area during the 1908 and 1909. Like in the Northern and southern districts, resistance by the western Idoma people was hampered by lack of unity. The expedition encountered only occasional and ill-organized resistance as was the case in Otukpa. With the suppression of the Ugbokolo rebellion of 1928, the active military phase of the British occupation of the entire Idoma land had effectively come to a close.³¹

Colonial Infrastructures and the Introduction of Taxation

Arising from the fact that, the process of establishing colonial rule in Western Idomaland was marked by the use of brute force, the creation of colonial infrastructures such as public works department, the railway cooperation Native Authority Policing, Native Authority Prisons and Native Authority Courts were created to manipulate people via the

²⁹. NAK Makprof/ACC112/Special Report, 1925.

³⁰. Chessu oral tradition cited in O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria*: in T. Falola and O. O. Okpeh (ed), *Population Movement, Conflict and Displacement in Nigeria*, (Treton, African World Press, Inc., 2008). 40-41.

³¹. V. G. O'kwu, *Idoma Land Under Colonial Rule 1900-1950*, Niger-Benue Seminar, Jos, Department of History, A.B.U. Zaria. 1974, 10.

colonial taxation to abandon their self-sustaining socio-economic lives and take up paid jobs at the aforementioned colonial infrastructures as well as the Jos tin and Enugu coal mines for wage labour. Despite all of these, it is pointless, to argue that, there has been no great change in the society of Western Idomaland during the colonial era as there were other positive impacts to the colonial creations such as the introduction of water storage (Ogoh) for harvesting water during raining season as well as health centres, roads and missionary schools in and around Western Idomaland.³²

As opined by Meijida, the basis of colonial introduction of the various forms of taxes was primarily meant to play vital functions mostly geared towards undermining the economic growth and sovereignty of the colony. Taxes were imposed firstly in order to maintain the colonial administration, its infrastructure and facilities. Additionally, the taxes imposed on certain business and manufacturing ventures such as black smelting, and cloth weaving industries, were meant to ruin those investments and stop the goods from competing with the European manufactured goods. Though, with the collapse of these businesses their operators can become a potential labour force ready for exploitation by the Colonial Authority. For this reason, the Native Authority Revenue Proclamation of 1901 vested in the Resident the power to divide the province into districts for the purpose of tax collection.³³ In the colonial records, the aim of taxation and the brutal process by which it was collected have been sugar-coated by the use of such words and phrase as moral benefit, stimulant to industry and production. In defence of his Native Revenue Ordinance of 1916, F. D. Lugard stressed the necessity of taxation for any state which was on the path of civilisation, clarifying that;

"Experience seems to point to the conclusion that a country as fertile as this direct taxation is a moral

³². Interview with J. O. Ofiekwu, 79 years, Ex-serviceman, at Ede-Otukpa, Benue State, 3/1/2022.

³³. M. M. Mejida, "Colonial Taxation and Inter-Ethnic Animosity: A Study of Nasarawa Province, 1900-1960" in *Studies in Inter-Group Relations in Central Nigeria, Essays in Honour of Professor John Garah Nengel*, (ed) O. O. Okpeth'al, (Lagos: Integrity Publishers, 2019), 183.

benefit to the people by stimulating industry and production³⁴

Though, from the perspectives of Africans, colonial taxation meant far more than that. In the words of M. Crowder, the three main functions of colonial taxation as actually envisaged by Lord Lugard was that;

Taxation was to serve as a stimulus to production for export... It was to serve as a source of true revenue as well as a sign of total submission to colonial authority...³⁵

It is observed that, they people of Western Idomaland viewed colonial taxation as a way of forcing them to assume a position of tenancy of the land they inherited from their ancestors, and enter into relationship with capitalist partners in a subordinate capacity and how their people made a show of surrendering to the British forces under duress. Besides, the manner in which taxes were collected revealed the ultimate goal of colonial taxation. By its emphasis on payment in cash, taxation created the demand for the British currency, which in turn made wage labour at the Enugu coal mines the only option opened to the residents of western Idomaland and their neighbours in Enugu.³⁶

Impact of British Colonial Rule in Western Idoma Land

Generally, after the imposition of colonial rule in Africa, British colonial economic policy, like any other European power in Africa, proposed that the colonies should be financially self-supporting. Economic development of colonial structures, revenue for the establishment, and sustenance of colonial structures had to be generated internally meanwhile, the economic development of the colonies was also, left to private enterprise while colonial government provided some basic infrastructures to facilitate their colonial subjects to raise the much needed revenue and prove to the Africans that, the whites were in charge. According to Michael Crowder;

³⁴. M. M. Mejida, "Colonial Taxation and Inter-Ethnic Animosity:" 183.

³⁵. M. M. Mejida, 184.

³⁶. Oral interview with OnyewuAmeh, 74 years, Trader, Orokam Centre, 18/06/2022.

"Lord Lugard saw taxation as a triple edge weapon, as a stimulus to production, as a source of revenue for the colonial administration; it marked the recognition by the community of the protector."³⁷

Consequently, after the forceful subjugation of the entire Idomaland, the areas like Edumoga, Ichama, Okpoga, Otukpa, Orokam, and Owukpa which made up Western Idomaland like every other parts, was administered by the British like a conquered territory with absolute contempt and total disregard for the cultural idiosyncrasies and beliefs of the people. As against the traditional methods of leadership which was derived from hard work, demonstrated competence and knowledge of and robust relationship with the gods of the land, warrant chiefs were imposed on the people by the British authority regardless of whether or not this institution had a place in the history of the people. By this, the people were forced to receive orders from the warrant chiefs who acted as substitutes for the colonial invaders.³⁸

The greatest source of resistance with which the administration had to contend with, was the vexed issue of taxation which was introduced immediately following the occupation of the area. The concept of taxation was not only alien to the people of western Idomaland but, to the entire Idoma people. For instance, the more the people resisted the imposition of foreigners and alien institutions the more the British authorities strengthened the alien institutions and forcefully pushed them down the throats of the people.³⁹ Accordingly, there was the added problem of finding the coins with which to pay tax. This problem was further aggravated by the government's refusal to accept copper rods, nor did alien traders endear themselves to the people by collecting what small quantities of coins which were in circulation. The methods of collection were often crude and women were also taxed. During the war

³⁷. A. Z. Ngharen, 137-138

³⁸. Oral interview with: J. E. Onyeke, 87 years, Ex-service man, Ipari, Otukpa, 12/04/2021.

³⁹. Oral Interview with: Agbochini Okewu, 82 years, Ex-hunter/farmer, Okpongaga-Otukpa, 10/04/2021

years, the administration of the settled districts was reduced to sporadic tax raids by administrative officers. But as late as 1940, after the outbreak of the World War II, there was a campaign against payment of taxes to the British.⁴⁰

As a decisive factor of contact, colonialism ensured the disruption of self-sufficient and self-perpetuating communities straddling the territory that was to become Nigeria, they introduced private ownership of land, extended the use of British currencies and exchange, imposed force labour and the recruitment of labour for wages, destroyed competitive indigenous industries, created new elite groups who eventually transmuted into the political and economic partners of the imperial powers.⁴¹ The point therefore is that, there were mass population movements from the study area arising from the military activities of the British. Although records on these are scarce, these displacements and forced migrations impacted seriously on the demography of Western Idomaland.⁴²

The policies of colonial administration were influenced by a number of important factors like official government policy, official prejudice, the calibre of administrative personnel and the Idoma socio-political setting or environment. The British colonialists wanted a system that was both cost effective and possessed sufficient brutality and capacity to compel obedience and effect tax collection. The Western Idoma traditional system did not possess these qualities since it was basically an egalitarian society.⁴³ The British insisted on indirect rule system which was centred on the nature and application of the system of local administration introduced into the Northern Province by Lord Lugard.⁴⁴

The lack of principle or *modus operandi* of the application of the system among the non-Muslim areas like western Idoma land, created

⁴⁰. A. Z. Ngharen, F. Muazu, et al., 17.

⁴¹. O. O. Okpeh, *Inter-Group Migrations, Conflicts, and Displacements in Central Nigeria...*, 39-40.

⁴². Oral Interview with; T. Omada Emaikwu, 82 years, Female, Ex-Labour migrant, in Omuorokpo, 23/03/2022

⁴³. Oral interview with; Michael Attah Ojobo 84 years, Male, Ex-Labour migrant, in Okpudu, 20/06/2022.

⁴⁴. O. Ikime, "Reconsidering Indirect Rule", 15.

additional uncertainty and pain among the communities. This created severe agitation and conflict which resulted in migration, death and imprisonment of many irreconcilables. For instance, among the societies of the Western Idomaland, most of the irreconcilables preferred to migrate elsewhere rather than live under such abuse as the resistance to this aberration manifested in various ways including migrations, refusal to farm, psychological and mental breakdown as the conquest and subjugation by the British, was mainly brutal.⁴⁵ The hostility to colonial brutality that was accompanied with the conquest of Western Idomaland filled the people with general sense of fear for the colonial administration as this, with time, toughened into persistent confrontation to colonialism and migration.⁴⁶

In Eliagwu's account, the introduction of taxes, payable in British currency, meant that the people had to engage in cash crop production or sell their labour in the markets or work in Enugu coal mines in order to obtain money to meet the new economic demands.⁴⁷ The colonial officials, in consultation with their appointed chiefs carried out three assessments. They took into account the amount of land under cultivation, crops and livestock's as a basis for assessing an individual's income as well as the disposition of individuals or community towards the colonial government. The taxes were collected by the district heads or their representatives, accompanied by the (Idoma Native Law Enforcement Agents).

Lord Lugard in his earlier memoranda had advised colonial officials to ensure the selection of the most capable and to also ensure that such men should be invested with authority and responsibility for the purpose of assessment and collection of taxes. In addition to strengthening the authority of the chiefs, other structures such as the police Ogbenyo, courts, tax collectors Omi'jehaje, were put in place to ensure prompt collection of taxes and punish offenders. It was the combined action of these structures, coupled with other circumstances prevailing at the time,

⁴⁵. A. Z. Ngharenet'al, 'Ban Mada; History and Culture of a People,' (Abuja: Selidan Books Africa Educational Series), 2014, 14-16.

⁴⁶. Oral interview with; Michael Attah Ojobo, 20/06/2022.

⁴⁷. Oral Interview; Jacob OnahEliagwu 82 years, male, Ex-service man, Ola'chagbaha, 28/06/2022.

as well as the impact of the Great Depression, that necessitated the mass movements to the mines and other wage-earning engagements since the compulsory payment of taxes in European currency was therefore a critical measure in the monetisation of African economies as well as the spread of wage labour.⁴⁸

Among the western Idoma, considering the rate at which the taxes were rising, two points can be made, firstly as shown by Mr. E. M. Walters's Wealth Assessment of 1920, no significant improvement could be made in productivity within such a short period to warrant such increases in tax. Thus the intention of the colonial administration was to force the people to seek alternative means, naturally at the tin and coal mines, in paying their taxes secondly, since the Okpoga Division could not support the large scale cultivation of cash/export crops for British industries, they must offer their labour for exploitation at the mines, hence, "migratory labour was their next option because of taxes imposed on the people inhabiting areas on which could not produce cash crops."⁴⁹

Resistance to taxation was put down as dishonesty and people were punished with collective or individual fines. The communities of Western Idomaland resisted tax payments, culminating in the bloody military patrols that continuously terrorized the area and in the process, hundreds of lives were lost between 1917 to 1918 as the British imposed a tax of £1189.30.0 on Okpoga Division.⁵⁰ The administration, under pressure from the mining companies concluded that the tax rate was low to have the desired effect of persuading the Western Idoma people to go to the mines. Thus, within a period of four years and without any reasonable improvement in the income level of the people, taxes were raised from one shillings and by 1928, the general tax was increased to £5735.10.0 then to £6610.8.4 in 1929.⁵¹

The imposed taxes without the corresponding rise in wages was a deliberate strategy of keeping labour perpetually at the mines as the rate

⁴⁸. M. M. Mejida, "Colonial Taxation and Inter-Ethnic Animosity", 2019, 184-185.

⁴⁹. M. Crowther, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, (Hutchinson & Co. Ltd: London, 1968), 245.

⁵⁰. Nak/Mak/Prof/ACC91/Special Report, 1920, 34.

⁵¹ NakMak/Prof/ACC27/Old District Note Books, 1933.

in 1928 has however, reached five shillings (5/-) per adult male and (3/-) for women.⁵² The tax agents, collected these monies and remitted, to the District Heads who in turn took it to the Resident in Okpoga. Thus by 1933, all general taxes were paid in throughout Okpoga Division through the District Head via the village head agents. This was however, paid to the Native Authority Treasury at Okpoga.⁵³

Typically, the imposition of tax by the British failed to acknowledge people's livelihoods, and did not recognize poverty amongst the poor. Taxation was detested and dreaded for its exploitative nature on the approaches of the various agencies empowered to collect the taxes. As a bureaucratic pre-requisite for effective operation of taxation, structures like the Native Treasury, Native Authority Police, Native Authority Court, and the Native Authority Prison were put in place.⁵⁴ Resistance to colonial taxation pushed many men and women away from their homes in Western Idomaland. Just like in faraway Europe and America, the story was the same as resistance to taxation formed the main philosophy behind the American war of independence. The French revolution also, found expression in taxation.⁵⁵

Another dimension of the introduction of taxation in western Idoma land, initially pushed the different communities into cash crop production in other words, there was a shift from food crop production to cash crop production. This however, led to a restructuring of the economy which became traumatic for the colonial economy. The major cash crops produced in western Idoma area was palm fruits and kola nuts.⁵⁶ The absence of market economy, and therefore of the British currency to pay the colonial taxes sent able-bodied men and women to the tin and coal mines. Thus colonial taxation fashioned an important aspect of the huge directory of the consequences of colonialism on the people of Western Idomaland.

⁵². M. Crowther, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule...* 245.

⁵³. NakMak/Prof/ACC27/Old District Note Books, 1933.

⁵⁴. M. M. Mejida, "Colonial Taxation and Inter-Ethnic Animosity..." 2019, 189.

⁵⁵. R. R. Palmer and J. Cotton, "A History of the Modern World", (Alfred A and Knoff: New York, 1965), 338-339.

⁵⁶. Interview: Jacob Onogwu 81 years, Male, Ex-farmer, Ukpoko/Orokam, Benue State, 21/1/2022.

Conclusion / Recommendations

The paper has argued that, as elsewhere in Africa and every other area across that came under colonial experience, the imposition of British colonialism in the study area was in line with the exigencies of the 20th century imperialism. The paper has shown that colonialism disrupted traditional social, economic and political institutions in the area and argues further that the legacies of colonialism laid the basis for the nature of postcolonial socio-political development. The paper recommends the strengthening of the existing traditional socio-political institutions which is imperative for the socio-economic and political development of the study area.

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